

KONRAD SZCZEŚNIAK

THE MEANING  
OF CONSTRUCTIONS

THE  
COGNITIVE  
DENIAL OF THE  
LEXICON-SYNTAX  
DIVISION



WYDAWNICTWO  
UNIWERSYTETU ŚLĄSKIEGO  
KATOWICE 2014

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PRACE  
NAUKOWE  
  
UNIWERSYTETU  
ŚLĄSKIEGO  
W KATOWICACH

NR 3221

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Copy editing and proofreading: Gabriela Marszołek  
Cover designer: Konrad Szcześniak  
Technical editing: Małgorzata Pleśniar  
Typesetting: Marek Zagniński

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Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego  
Wszelkie prawa zastrzeżone

**ISSN 0208-6336**  
**ISBN 978-83-8012-271-0**  
(print edition)  
**ISBN 978-83-8012-272-7**  
(digital edition)

Publisher  
**Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego**  
**ul. Bankowa 12B, 40-007 Katowice**  
**www.wydawnictwo.us.edu.pl**  
e-mail: wydawus@us.edu.pl

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First impression. Printed sheets 15,25. Publishing sheets  
18,0. Offset paper grade III 90g  
Price 20 PLN (+VAT)

Printing and binding: "TOTEM.COM.PL Sp. z o.o." Sp.K.  
ul. Jacewska 89, 88-100 Inowrocław

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## 1. Introduction

New approaches to language description, especially cognitive linguistic theories, have taken a radically revisionist position toward Generative models and other, by now “traditional” grammars. Many fundamental assumptions about language structure have been questioned, revised or rejected entirely in frameworks like Construction Grammar (Goldberg, 1995), Simpler Syntax (Culicover & Jackendoff, 2005), or Lexical Functional Grammar (Bresnan, 2001). New models and theories of language structure find themselves contesting at least some of the following generative assumptions:

1. *The syntactocentric view of language.* Doubt has been cast on the role of syntax as the only component responsible for imposing structure on sentences.
2. *The innateness of UG.* The question of how much linguistic complexity is innately determined and how much has to be learned has been an ongoing question whose intractability is comparable to the more general nature vs. nurture debate. Recently the pendulum has swung toward the learning extreme, with construction grammarians stressing the numbers of constructions that make up the knowledge of language.
3. *The universal nature of language.* An inevitable consequence of questioning innateness is an increased emphasis on cross-linguistic diversity. Stressing diversity over similarity (or vice versa) is, much like self-serving manipulation of statistics, a function of how linguistic data are interpreted, but currently, more effort seems to go into demonstrating uniqueness.
4. *Underlying levels of syntax.* Deep structure analyses have been replaced by monostratal approaches, which purport to account for sentence structure more straightforwardly, without the need for invoking hidden abstract levels of representation.

5. *Derivations.* Related to the above abandonment of deep structure is the need to replace derivational operations with constraints which allow correct syntactic configurations and rule out others.
6. *The division between the lexicon and syntax.* Rather than being separate, lexical and function forms have been argued to occupy a continuum with a large transitional midsection of elements that exhibit both lexical and syntactic properties.
7. *Modularity.* Not only are the lexicon and syntax unlikely to be disjoint sets, but more generally, it has been argued that genetically determined modules dedicated to culture-dependent skills like reading are implausible.
8. *The division between core and periphery.* The success of the Standard Theory was conditional on confining focus to the core phenomena and ignoring idiosyncratic idioms relegated to periphery. Recently, as the number of idiosyncratic constructions being uncovered grew, it has become obvious that periphery has become a much too large a refuse heap—an elephant in the room that can no longer be dismissed as unimportant to linguistic analysis.

Among reasons behind these mistaken assumptions is that in the early days of Generative Grammar, research could not benefit from tools like automated corpora, which make it possible to confront theorizing with evidence (Stefanowitsch, 2006). Nowadays, analyses of corpus data are used, among other things, to illustrate the magnitude of periphery or the blurred division between the lexicon and syntax.

However, corpus data are rarely marshaled to question the new post-generative views, even fairly implausible ones, such as the belief in highly semanticized closed-class constructions (Szczęśniak, 2013). The objective of this contribution is to attempt to reconcile current and traditional Generative Grammar models. While the generative assumptions about language may have been simplistic, it is unlikely that they are all wrong. Rejecting them prematurely may be throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Half a century after the beginning of the generative tradition seems like a good moment to take stock and consider the opposing views, evaluate their relative merits and shortcomings, and find common ground. This study of grammatical constructions like the *x's way*, incredulity construction, or the *into*-gerund construction addresses the following questions:

- Is it possible to reconcile the lexicon-syntax continuum with the traditional division view?
- Are traditional views of closed-class function forms as desemanticized elements valid? (Talmy, 2000a)
- Can peripheral phenomena (like meaningful idiomatic constructions) be accounted for by assuming the division of the lexicon and syntax?

The present study will attempt to answer the above questions by focusing mainly on one contested issue, namely that of the division between syntax and the lexicon. It is against the backdrop of the syntax-lexicon continuum that we will consider the semantic content and formal characteristics of grammatical constructions. Just like increased reliance on corpus data helped revisit generative views on language, here too, previously unavailable data on the use of grammatical constructions will be provided to question some of the more recent cognitive views on the semantic capacity of closed-class forms and the division between the modules of the lexicon and syntax.

### 1.1. Traditional Distinction

It has traditionally been assumed that language naturally segregates its forms into two major superclasses, one containing lexical categories like nouns and adjectives, that is, forms with rich lexical meanings, and the other including grammatical categories like articles, pronouns or conjunctions, classes that do not so much have meanings as functions or relational content. The belief in the division is justified by a long list of distinguishing features that set the two classes apart, which will be discussed below. For example, the very names that the two classes are known by, open- and closed-class forms, reflect the observation that the former readily accept new members, while the latter tend to resist new additions. In consequence, open-class forms are orders of magnitude more numerous, numbering in the tens or even hundreds of thousands of items, than closed-class forms whose numbers do not exceed a few hundred.

The distinction has classical origins and follows straightforwardly from the intuitive sense that the lexicon is separate from grammar. This is evident in Panini's distinction into the lexicon *dhātupāṭha* and grammar *kātantra*. In Europe, Aristotle divided language forms into those that can have their own independent meaning and those whose meaning can only be realized in conjunction with other forms. Given this semantic dependence on conjoining, Aristotle referred to function words as *σύνδεσμος* (*syndesmos*) "conjunctions," by which he understood a large category including not only conjunctions, but also pronouns and articles (Arens, 1984, p. 129). The lexicon-grammar divide is a partition considered as something of an axiom held since the first ancient studies of language, and unquestioned until around the 1980s. Thus, the distinction has

a venerable tradition continued in the work on grammaticalization, one of whose major insights is that grammatical items can be traced back to lexical words. In the twentieth century, the division into open-class and closed-class forms has figured explicitly or implicitly in analyses of many different questions in the linguistic literature. Henry Sweet (1913, p. 31) saw it in qualitative terms in his observation that “grammar deals with the general facts of language, lexicology with the special facts.” Similarly, Jespersen (1924, p. 32) noted that “[w]hen we come to consider the best way in which to arrange linguistic facts, we are at once confronted with the very important division between grammar and dictionary (lexicology).” The division is even more evident in Bloomfield’s (1933, p. 274) dismissive pronouncement that the lexicon is “an appendix of the grammar, a list of basic irregularities.” Chomsky used this view to justify his decision to focus on syntax and disregard the lexicon as a locus of idiosyncrasies not worthy of generalizations. The distinction is also at the heart of the Words and Rules Theory (Pinker & Prince, 1991; Pinker, 1999), which assumed that rules and lexical items are processed by two qualitatively different mechanisms, namely a pattern-based mechanism processing rules and a mechanism for handling lexical items as idiosyncratic forms.

## 1.2. Rejection

Recently, however, the worth of the distinction has been put in question. The first signs of problems with the distinction were noted already in the early years of Generative Grammar research when Chomsky realized that idioms were not easily captured by the generative model, the solution being to put aside “phenomena that result from historical accident, dialect mixture, personal idiosyncrasies, and the like” in the hope that they would be explained later (Chomsky, 1995, p. 20). Then Fillmore’s work on idioms led to the recognition that despite their phrasal form, they are irreducible units of language not explained by other more abstract principles, and they cannot be characterized in a level-independent way. Fillmore, Kay and O’Connor (1988) observed that they are therefore in many ways akin to individual morphemes and in others to large freely composable phrases accounted for by general rules of syntax. The problem that idioms pose is that they cannot be placed on either side of the lexicon-grammar divide. The sense of fuzziness is further aggravated by the fact that idioms themselves are not a homogenous group; they come in varying degrees of schematicity, some being strongly substantive and

others fairly schematic and open to be filled with lexical material. Such a varied set of lexico-syntactic forms sprawls astride the division, which can be taken as an argument for questioning its purpose or even very existence. One indication of the fuzziness problem is that some categories are treated differently by different scholars. For example, prepositions are considered closed-class items by some (e.g., Talmy, 2001; Tyler & Evans, 2003; Langacker, 2008), others place them between open and closed-class categories (Zelinsky-Wibbelt, 1993; Saint-Dizier, 2006). This is no doubt due to the transitional status of prepositions which cannot be grouped unequivocally with either of the two.

This has made it reasonable enough to either downplay or openly reject the notion of a lexico-syntactic division, a decision made by scholars representing many models of grammar. Among the main assumptions of Hudson's Word Grammar is the claim that "[n]o distinction is assumed (or found) between 'rules' and 'lexical items.'" (Holmes & Hudson, 2005, p. 243). The distinction is also suspended in HPSG (Pollard & Sag, 1994), where lexical items come with detailed information on both their semantic and syntactic properties. Culicover & Jackendoff (2005, p. 26) claim that "the traditional distinction between lexicon and grammar is mistaken." In another work, Jackendoff also refers to the lexicon grammar distinction as a "fundamental mistake" (Jackendoff, 2007, p. 53). The fuzziness of the lexicon-syntax divide is taken as an example of a more general tendency for mental components to transition smoothly rather than exhibit sharp divisions; a position assumed in Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk's (2007) analysis of polysemy, which "as understood in cognitive terms, is an exponent of the absence of clear boundaries between semantics and pragmatics (as it is an exponent of the absence of clear boundaries between lexicon and syntax...)" (2007, p. 154). The boundary is also questioned in Goldberg's Construction Grammar (1995; 2006) and Langacker's Cognitive Grammar (2008). The objections put forth by cognitive scholars can be summed up as the belief that the distinction is at odds with the symbolic thesis, which treats syntactic constructions as inherently meaningful. Briefly, because the distinction presupposes semantic austerity of closed-class forms, including syntactic patterns which clearly and unequivocally do have meanings, it does not seem an exaggeration to conclude that observing the distinction may be an obstacle for research focusing on the meaning content of constructions. In light of that, it seems only reasonable to ignore the distinction. Thus, the cognitive linguistic skepticism of the separation of lexicon and grammar has been motivated by the very view of language which is now seen in its entirety to consist of meaning-form pairings. In short, suspending the restriction against meanings in closed-class forms meant

getting a major obstacle out of the way of theorizing about “the detailed semantics and distribution of particular words, grammatical morphemes, and cross-linguistically unusual phrasal patterns” (Goldberg, 2006, p. 5). It is evident enough that the distinction is a non-banal issue. It is unlikely to be a mere illusion that persisted until the end of the twentieth century. As will be demonstrated below, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence in favor of postulating a qualitative division that organizes language forms. Yet at the same time, rather paradoxically, the strong sense of separation does not translate into a binary distinction by a sharp line. The more one reviews intermediate cases of forms that seem to fall where the division should lie, the more the distinction turns out to be a disappointingly facile dichotomy.

Incidentally, it is rather obvious why the two domains are separated by a blurred intermediate district, and not a sharp on-off distinction. The indistinct division is a direct consequence of grammaticalization, which is itself characterized by gradual and not discrete stages. The division is fuzzy because that is the only way an item can cross over: dramatic changes cannot happen overnight as one-fell-swoop transformations; they have to be gradual. Many forms located in the middle are elements in transit (it is not mere speculation to predict that transitional forms like *concerning* or *notwithstanding* will continue their progress toward becoming full-fledged prepositions and will at some point approach the closed-class extreme). Furthermore, a form in transition is often found to exhibit a considerable synchronic distribution of meanings: a case in point is the verb *can*, which retains a range of meanings, some of which more lexical than other, more grammaticalized ones (Bybee & Pagliuca, 1987; Bybee, 2010). A glance at the definitions of *can* in any dictionary shows a range of meanings at various stages of grammaticalization, from the lexical ‘knowledge, skill’ to more grammatical ‘general possibility’ meanings. The coexistence of such varied meanings within a single verb is itself an indication of the inherently fuzzy nature of the lexicon-syntax system. The fuzziness is a synchronic reflection of diachronic developments.

The difficulty in finding a division is in fact a restatement of the difficulty in determining the point at which lexical items turn into grammatical forms. As Bybee and others (1994, p. 10) observe, “[o]ne problem in identifying the properties of lexical items that are candidates for grammaticalization is the problem of determining at exactly what point we can say that grammaticalization has begun.” Of course, one cannot determine any such point exactly, except perhaps arbitrarily. Still, this does not make it impossible to talk about grammaticalization, its directionality, irreversibility and end product that is qualitatively different from the original material.

Apart from blunt observations that the distinction is misguided, a widely adopted solution has been to approach it as a continuum, a view proposed by Langacker (1987; 2008), Gentner and Boroditsky (2001) or Evans and Green (2006). As Langacker puts it:

There is no meaningful distinction between grammar and lexicon. Lexicon, morphology, and syntax form a continuum of symbolic structures, which differ along various parameters but can be divided into separate components only arbitrarily. (1987, 3)

### 1.3. Meaning

This may seem like a reasonable move, accounting for the fuzziness of the boundary, but it does not really do it justice in practice. Proposals by many scholars to preserve the distinction in gradient form are merely verbal declarations, and in reality the continuum compromise provides a justification to ignore the distinction altogether, the thinking being that since all language forms are symbolic in nature (Langacker, 2008), then closed-class forms may have any kind of meaning. This is either an implicit assumption in many constructionist analyses of syntactic patterns or is an open assertion, as in Kay and Michaelis (2012, p. 2278), who propose that “[p]robably any kind of meaning that occurs can be the semantic contribution of a construction.” Similarly, Wierzbicka (2006) claims that there exist “[l]inks between culture and grammar” and that “grammatical categories of a language also encode meaning” (p. 171), which she demonstrates by means of many items, among which an “extremely rich and elaborate system of expressive derivation applicable to proper names (specifically, names of persons)” (p. 171) (to be discussed below here). To take another example, in a study of future constructions, Hilpert (2008) signals that they “are viewed as linguistic forms that are endowed with rich meanings that include, but may well go beyond, future time reference” (p. 1).

What is striking about the above views is that they seem to rest on the assumption that constructions located toward the closed-class end of the continuum have meanings whose degree of specificity may in principle be comparable to what is observed in open-class forms. This extreme claim is endorsed by Goldberg (2006) who points out that the concern with meanings of constructions is a hallmark of constructionist approaches:

the hypothesis behind this methodology is that an account of the rich semantic/pragmatic and complex formal constraints on these patterns readily extends to more general, simple, or regular patterns. (Goldberg 2006, p. 5)

In the same vein, the presumption of semantic equality throughout the continuum is also present in Croft's declaration that "[t]he *only* difference is that constructions are complex, made up of words and phrases, while words are syntactically simple" (Croft, 2007, pp. 470–471, my emphasis).

I am not the first to voice skepticism about the cognitive insistence on postulating detailed meanings in schematic constructions. For example, Ward (1994) takes issue with Lakoff's (1977) characterization of the "prototype of transitivity." What he criticizes is precisely the overfine detail proposed by Lakoff:

Lakoff's (1977) prototype for transitivity includes the provisions that the agent be looking at the patient and that he perceive a change in the patient. This is plausible as an experiential prototype (*gestalt*), and if it turns out that language indeed refers to such information, then some sophisticated matching of constructions to meanings may well be needed. However, Lakoff did not show that these provisions are necessary for explaining language use, and so, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, I conjecture that matching can be done by independently scoring across each of the dimensions involved.

What is particularly interesting about this example is that transitivity is probably among the most grammatical categories conceivable, the most removed from the open-class part of the continuum, and could therefore be expected to exhibit only sparse abstract meanings. And yet, even in such cases, cognitive characterizations cast them as involving concrete semantic elements such as "the agent is looking at the patient, the change in the patient is perceptible, and the agent perceives the change" (Lakoff, 1987, p. 55).

This is not to say that the entire cognitive linguistic community has abandoned the lexicon-syntax distinction. Talmy's (2000a) influential Conceptual Structuring System presupposes a strict divide between the lexical and grammatical subsystems and proposes that the former is responsible for the *content* of a sentence's cognitive representation, while the latter determines its *structure*. Bowerman (1996) stresses the sparseness of meanings conveyed by closed-class items as follows:

In searching for the ultimate elements from which the meanings of closed-class spatial words such as the set of English prepositions are

composed, researchers have been struck by the relative sparseness of what can be important. Among the things that can play a role are notions like verticality, horizontality, place, region, inclusion, contact, support, gravity, attachment, dimensionality (point, line, plane or volume), distance, movement, and path . . . . Among things that never seem to play a role are, for example, the color, exact size or shape, or smell of the figure and ground objects . . . . (p. 422)

Sullivan (2013, p. 125) observes that a “combination of open-class items . . . can express any conceptual metaphor” while “the literal meanings of closed-class items . . . are limited to simple spatial, force-dynamic and image-schematic meanings.” Boas (2010) points out that Goldberg’s (1995) own analysis is actually predicated on there being “at least two distinct categories of linguistic information that interact with each other, namely lexical entries and argument structure constructions.” He goes on to observe that this “suggests a *de facto* separation between syntax and the lexicon, despite her claim that ‘the lexicon is not neatly differentiated from the rest of grammar’” (Boas, 2010, p. 57). Similarly, Van Valin (2007, p. 236) points out problems with Goldberg’s (2006) decision to fuse the lexicon with syntax and to equalize all language forms, as expressed in the manifesto “all levels of grammatical analysis involve constructions: learned pairings of form with semantic or discourse function, including morphemes or words, idioms, partially lexically filled and fully general phrasal patterns” (Goldberg, 2006, p. 5). As Van Valin argues, the claim that everything is a construction has little content, whether theoretical and empirical. Moreover, if constructions are merely learned form-meaning pairings, they can only be language-specific. This position is quite inconsistent with and has no way of accounting for cross-linguistic generalisations.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.4. Against Rejecting Too Soon

This study will seek to demonstrate that the lexicon-syntactic divide may have been dismissed too soon. Even if the boundary is inherently and irreparably fuzzy and no practical way of demarcating the two magisteria can be found, this is no reason to abandon the distinction. It is one thing to establish the fuzziness of the boundary, and quite another to conclude

<sup>1</sup> In fact, Goldberg goes so far as to claim that except for cognitive generalizations, there are no cross-linguistic generalisations.

that it means the absence of that boundary. To take this tack is to commit the continuum fallacy, which involves arguing that if two extremes are connected by small intermediate differences and if at no step can one indicate a decisive difference, then the extremes are the same. To use an analogy, inability to specify at what temperature cold turns to hot should not lead to the conclusion that cold is really the same as hot. But this is more or less what happens when the fuzziness of the distinction is taken as a justification of viewing all language forms as constructions and granting them equal semantic potential.

One could even suspect that the revisionist atmosphere surrounding discussions of the lexicon of syntax may be an artifact of the emphasis on fuzziness as a crucial feature of the most fundamental concepts in linguistics such as degree of grammaticalness (Chomsky, 1961) or prototype (Ross, 1972; Rosch, 1975a; 1975b). Applications of prototype and its inherent fuzziness are not limited to analyses of conceptual categories within semantics (Geeraerts, 1989), but are also invoked in studies in phonology (Jaeger, 1980) or syntax (Ross, 1973; Kalisz, 1981). Indeed, the use of prototypes as a linguistic tool is so widespread that Wierzbicka (1996) and Posner (1986) warn against its overuse. Posner admits that linguists were “enamored of the prototype idea” (1986, p. 55) because of its promise of explanatory power. Wierzbicka remarks that prototype has been “treated as an excuse for intellectual laziness and sloppiness,” and goes on to attempt the prediction that “if [fuzzy prototype] is treated as a magical key to open all doors without effort, the chances are that it will cause more harm than good” (1996, p. 167). One could explain away any exception, anomaly or contradiction as a case of fuzziness; constructions could also be treated as family resemblance structures with no necessary conditions for natural usage, and this way no violated constraint will be a problem, but this would effectively make it unnecessary to attempt to describe construction. The prototype idea and the family resemblance structure both presuppose that constructions involve a high degree of inherent imprecision, which is a plausible hypothesis, but a hypothesis nonetheless. I believe that prototype and family resemblance should be invoked only as a last resort, when no other descriptions are capable of capturing the nature of a construction with some precision.

Here, in the context of the lexicon and syntax too, the case of fuzziness is probably being overplayed. Put more simply, I believe that a fuzzy distinction is better than none at all. The insight from the distinction that closed-class forms have functions rather than meanings is still valid; that is, although closed-class forms can easily be demonstrated to carry meanings, these can and should be expected to be constrained. At the moment, many constructionist studies of syntactic patterns such as the

*way* construction (*YouTube your way to fame*) or the incredulity construction (*Him pilot spacecraft?!*) postulate meanings that are implausibly rich. Some care should be taken to verify the observed semantic and pragmatic effects against what closed-class forms are normally capable of conveying. As I will show below, many such fantastically colorful effects can be explained as contextual interpretations of far more basic meanings that a construction has. However, this is not to say that no multi-word pattern can convey contentful meanings. Obviously, intermediate forms that share properties of lexical and function forms can be expected to contribute richer semantic content than a completely abstract function form could.

This suggests that it should be possible to predict the degree of semantic complexity of a language form. Just how rich a meaning of a construction is, depends on the degree to which it is substantive. While completely abstract forms are spare in meaning, the closer an item is to the lexical end of the continuum (that is, the more it is filled with lexical material) the richer its meaning. One corollary of this is that richer meanings found to occur in a syntactic pattern should be traceable to the lexical material embedded in the pattern. That is, if a construction is claimed to convey an open-class-style contentful meaning, it should be possible to point out a lexical item that is part of the construction and is responsible for that meaning.

To sum up, the present study will attempt to demonstrate the following four main points:

1. The lexicon-syntactic divide may have been dismissed too soon;
2. The meanings of syntactic constructions as presented in the literature are too rich;
3. The only exceptions to (2) are relatively contentful meanings that are normally associated with closed-class forms (e.g. possession, path or goal). These are found in many function forms in many languages.
4. Just how rich a meaning of a construction is, depends on the degree to which it is substantive.

## 1.5. Construction Grammar

The present study will focus on a number of examples of grammatical patterns analyzed within the framework of Construction Grammar (henceforth CxG). In line with CxG's tradition, it will follow the symbolic

thesis and the claim, held by many and put forth explicitly by Fried and Östman (2004, p. 24), that “a grammar is composed of conventional associations of form and meaning,” following Goldberg’s (1995) definition of constructions as pairings of form and meaning, or “learned pairings of form with semantic or discourse function” (Goldberg, 2006, p. 5). As will be shown in the discussion of each case reviewed in chapters 3–5, the constructions in question cannot be accounted for by general rules of syntax, and are therefore consistent with Croft’s characterization of constructions as “pairings of form and meaning that are at least partially arbitrary” (Croft, 2001, p. 18). In this sense, patterns like the *way* construction or the “time” *away* construction are real (as opposed to being some sort of special instances of more general rules) and must be stored as entries in the mental lexicon. The semantic effects that will be presented below are strong enough to justify a constructional approach. The CxG framework provides an explicit structure for analyzing such constructions that would be difficult, if not impossible, to capture in terms of general syntactic principles.

However, although this analysis fully subscribes to the view that syntactic patterns can carry specific and evident meanings, it will be argued that the meanings of syntactic constructions are constrained in very specific ways. Central in this contribution is the proposal that the meanings postulated for many constructions were implausibly rich and in some cases these elaborate effects can be shown to be contextual inferences rather than a construction’s inherent content. The present study will therefore attempt to separate the construction’s real meaning from that meaning’s pragmatic consequences of conversational principles. One of the welcome aspects of this approach is that it makes it possible to analyze the semantic effects of constructions without suspending the lexicon-grammar distinction, which presupposes a degree of semantic austerity for function forms.

Because most CxG analyses question the division between syntax and the lexicon, I will first review arguments against a modular organization of language put forth by cognitive linguists and construction grammarians. I will attempt to demonstrate that modularity in general and the lexicon-syntax division in particular do not have to be incompatible with the framework of CxG.

## 1.6. Dimensions of Constructions

In this section, Taylor's (2002; 2004) approach to constructions will be reviewed. His views on the dimensions along which constructions vary will serve to introduce the working definition of "construction" used in the present study. Taylor identifies four dimensions: schematicity, productivity, idiomacticity, and entrenchment.

### 1.6.1. Schematicity

Schematicity is the property of more general constructions whose use involves incorporation of variable items. Schematic constructions are those which, unlike fully specified structures, comprise empty slots. Schematic constructions can have more than one instantiation. For example, the expressions *(from) door to door*, *(from) cover to cover*, *(from) mouth to mouth* and other similar cases are related both by a common semantic pattern and the same syntactic frame. The commonality present in all of them is captured by the schematic formula  $[(\text{from}) X \text{ to } X]$ . Otherwise, fully specified structures like *once-over* in the sense of 'a quick look or appraisal' are non-schematic. The components of the structure are not subject to replacement to produce related instantiations of the construction.

### 1.6.2. Productivity

A related but separate property of constructions, productivity is the degree to which a schematic construction can yield new instantiations. While some very general constructions are almost completely productive (like the transitive construction), others are restricted. For example, Taylor shows that even very schematic constructions, such as  $[X \text{ by } X]$ , are limited in terms of their productivity. The  $[X \text{ by } X]$  construction is realized in some established instantiations like *day by day*, *one by one*, *page by page*, *step by step*, or *piece by piece*, but the  $[X \text{ by } X]$  schema does not always yield acceptable instantiations: *several by several* or *spend one's inheritance, cheque by cheque* (Taylor, 2004, p. 62).

### 1.6.3. Idiomaticity

Idiomaticity is perhaps the most obvious property of constructions and, indeed, it is invoked as a defining criterion by Goldberg (1995). A construction is idiomatic to the extent that its meaning is non-predictable. Goldberg restricts her definition of constructions to those structures whose properties are not “strictly predictable from knowledge of other constructions existing in the grammar” (p. 4). A structure like *come to grips with* is idiomatic because its non-transparent sense of ‘begin to deal with or understand’ cannot be predicted from the parts of the expression or from the general schema [V to N with]. By contrast, expressions such as *come to an agreement* are considerably more transparent, and ones like *come to a party* are even more so. It is a question of some interest whether expressions like *come to a party* should be considered idiomatic at all. I daresay that even such obviously transparent examples retain a degree of idiomaticity at least in the sense that the choice of words is formulaic here. Speakers of English seem to follow a schema along the lines of [come to N<sub>EVENT</sub>], yielding examples like *come to a meeting, dinner, the inauguration ceremony*, etc. Alternatives like *come on a party, move to a party or visit a party* would either sound odd or would require a special context to justify them.

It should also be born in mind that full predictability is rarer than one thinks. Many patterns may seem completely transparent, but that is often a result of familiarity. Philip (2011, p. 24) discusses the impression of transparency created by the collocation *fish and chips*, and notes that the meaning most speakers know is not in fact conveyed precisely by the component parts. That is, the name does not refer to any kind of fish (but typically to cod, haddock or plaice), and it refers to fish that has been deep-fried.

The dimension of idiomaticity overlaps somewhat with Makkai’s (1972) terminology. Highly idiomatic constructions are what he refers to as “idioms of decoding,” while many predictable constructions are “idioms of encoding.” The latter include formulaic patterns that a person learning the language may not have come across, but can be expected to understand readily when exposed to them. Makkai gives the example of the use of the preposition *at* in expressing speed in English (e.g. *I drove at 50 miles per hour*), which will be predictable enough to someone without a prior knowledge of this use, but it is idiomatic given that this sense can be and is expressed by means of different prepositions in other European languages, like *avec* in French or *mit* in German (pp. 24–25).

### 1.6.4. Entrenchment

Entrenchment is the degree to which a construction is established and represented in a speaker’s knowledge of grammar. At first glance, it may seem that it is practically the same thing as idiomaticity. Indeed, Goldberg affirmed that “[i]t is clear that knowledge about language must be learned and stored as such whenever it is not predictable from other facts” (Goldberg, 2006, p. 64). However, the two are separate properties. Goldberg admits that “patterns are also stored if they are sufficiently frequent, even when they are fully regular instances of other constructions, and thus predictable” (p. 64). Taylor gives the example of *have a nice day*, which is highly entrenched despite not being very idiomatic—its meaning can be predicted from the senses of its individual components and from the semantics of the imperative construction. Similarly, it is likely that for most speakers, the expression *game over* is entrenched, even though a speaker unfamiliar with it could predict its meaning based on the meanings of the two component parts alone. The need for entrenchment comes from conventionality. Even when an expression is predictable by virtue of being a regular instance of a more general construction, the exact wording has to be stored as a standard collocation preferable to possibilities like *live a nice day* or *game finished*—these may not be unacceptable, but are decidedly unusual and unidiomatic.

## 1.7. Definitions of “Construction”

Before we proceed, a review of various positions on constructions will be presented. This will serve as a starting point to propose an approach to constructions (in section 2.8 below) adopted in the following chapters.

As was pointed out above, within the framework of CxG, all concrete units of language are considered grammatical constructions. In Goldberg’s (1995) words,

According to Construction Grammar, a distinct construction is defined to exist if one or more of its properties are not strictly predictable from knowledge of other constructions existing in the grammar: C is a CONSTRUCTION iff<sub>def</sub> C is a form-meaning pair <F<sub>i</sub>, S<sub>i</sub>> such that some aspect of F<sub>i</sub> or some aspect of S<sub>i</sub> is not strictly predictable from C’s component parts or from other previously established constructions. (p. 4)

This definition can be traced back to Lakoff's (1987) view which he characterizes as an "enriched version" of the traditional sense of construction as

a configuration of syntactic elements (like *clause*, *noun*, *preposition*, *gerund*, etc.) paired with a meaning and/or use associated with that syntactic configuration. (p. 467)

The similarities are evident also in how the two formalize the definition. Lakoff specifies the two sides of the pairing as elements F and M, "where F is a set of conditions on syntactic and phonological form and M is a set of conditions on meaning and use" (p. 467). One important difference is that while Lakoff limits his definition to syntactically complex patterns, under Goldberg's interpretation, the term 'construction' can apply equally aptly to single lexical units (*watermelon*, *require*, etc.) on the one hand, and to larger, more general syntactic configurations (resultative construction) on the other. Goldberg's definition is thus more inclusive, as she expands the store of constructions to include all language forms that are paired with meaning.

Taylor's (2004) definition represents an even more radical move:

A construction is a linguistic structure that is internally complex, that is, a structure that can be analyzed into component parts. (p. 51)

This definition includes all those entities that Goldberg regards as constructions, but includes also non-idiosyncratic, predictable linguistic structures, as long as they are "analysable into component parts" (Taylor, 2002, p. 567). The two authors differ in their approach to the question of learnability of constructions. Goldberg is interested only in those elements that have to be learned because of their unpredictability, while Taylor's "criterion for identifying a construction concerns only an expression's internal structure, irrespective of the schematicity with which the construction is specified, and also irrespective of whether the properties of the construction are predictable (or, conversely, idiosyncratic)" (p. 567). Taylor's approach coincides with Goldberg's as regards the first two dimensions discussed in sections 1.6.1 and 1.6.2: both recognize that a construction may or may not allow unspecified variable slots to be filled with lexical material (schematicity) and that schematic constructions can have varying degrees of productivity, some allowing a wide range of creations and others being more restricted.<sup>2</sup> However, for Goldberg, only idiomatic and

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Taylor shows that even a highly schematic construction, such as X by Y (*one by one*, *day by day*, *page by page*) is not very productive, and some theoretical creations (e.g. *\*several by several*) are not possible (Taylor, 2004, p. 62).

entrenched entities (sections 1.6.3 and 1.6.4 above) count as constructions, while on Taylor’s definition, non-idiomatic and non-entrenched entities are considered constructions despite not necessarily being represented in a speaker’s mental grammar. As an illustration, he proposes that “[t]he sentence you are now reading is a construction, in that it can be broken down into its component words and phrases” (Taylor, 2012, p. 124).

At first glance, there is a sense that such non-idiomatic and non-entrenched entities go beyond the bounds of the constructicon. Most authors would not consider them constructions, for example, novel non-entrenched instances like *obese cat* are termed as “constructs” by Sullivan (2013, p. 13) if only because doing so would make constructions an unlimited set including both established forms and potential structures that need not be listed in the mental lexicon. As a consequence, referring to each internally analysable entity as a construction would hinder the description of a language user’s knowledge as opposed to her ability to comprehend novel structures. This is another way of saying that a radically all-embracing approach would blur the distinction between Chomsky’s E-language, that is “external language” as it occurs in the world (with its non-entrenched uses), and I-language, or the “internal language” as represented and *entrenched* in the mind. On the other hand, a possible defense can be raised by pointing out that the distinction between entrenched constructions and those about to enter the lexicon is also blurred, and hence all of them should be included. After all, entrenchment is a “gradual process of cognitive routinisation” (Langlotz, 2006), and this is so in at least two senses. First, any stretch of language appearing with sufficient frequency could in principle become part of the language. Second, at the level of an individual speaker, an expression enters the lexicon gradually through increasing degrees of neuronal association, and it would be arbitrary to insist that at some specific point that expression suddenly becomes entrenched—excluding any entities before that point could only be done arbitrarily. Further blurring the distinction is the fact that the status of the linguistic material in question will differ from speaker to speaker. Some may have come across it but hardly registered it, while for others it may be partly or fully entrenched.

Should nonce expressions like *thirty nine buttercups*, *to photograph a dumbbell* or *new variety of high-fiber apple* be considered constructions? They are each non-schematic, non-productive, non-idiomatic and non-entrenched (none yielded any results in a Google search). If Taylor’s dimensions can be treated as features in a prototype model, they would each be the least prototypical examples of constructions, if they are constructions at all. It seems counterintuitive to think of the above examples as constructions—if they are, is there anything that is *not* a construction?

The concept of “construction” becomes so all inclusive that it is nearly meaningless. What is striking here is that the reason why fully predictable structures should be regarded as constructions is the same as why fully lexical ones are regarded on a par with syntactic entities as constructions on Goldberg’s definition—the division between the extremes of each continuum is equally blurred.

If one can be skeptical about including predictable and non-entrenched entities under the category “constructions” solely on the grounds that a fuzzy boundary between entrenched and non-entrenched is insufficient to exclude the non-entrenched, one should reserve an equivalent degree of skepticism in relation to squaring lexical items with syntactic patterns under one umbrella term. As I will argue in the following section, a line should be drawn somewhere, even if only arbitrarily. Fuzzy boundaries, whether they occur between lexical and syntactic entities or between the predictable and the idiosyncratic should not be taken as an excuse to extend definitions indefinitely.

### 1.8. Terminological Note

Goldberg’s definition of constructions quoted in the above section includes all established language forms ranging from traditional syntactic constructions to small lexical items. This is no doubt a bold move honoring the undeniable similarities that single lexical items share with larger patterns, the main one of which is that all of them are pairings of form and meaning that are not fully predictable, and therefore must be learned and stored. However, while I will not devote this study to questioning Goldberg’s definition of “construction,” I will limit my analysis to syntactic patterns larger than single lexical items or even multi-word expressions. These may be entirely substantive phrases such as *walk the plank*, *chew the fat* or numerous other examples of what Nunberg and others (1994) term “idiomatic phrases” (e.g. *saw logs*) or the more syntactically flexible “idiomatically combining expressions.” While these allow a degree of decomposition and some of their parts can be modified by adjectives or relative clauses (Nunberg et al., 1994, p. 500), there are reasons to consider them as units on a par with single lexical items that belong in the lexicon. What distinguishes them most sharply from syntactic patterns is that if indeed there are empty slots in idiomatic phrases and idiomatically combining expressions, they are entirely optional; idioms do not leave empty slots to be obligatorily filled—a use of an idiom such as (11b) is perfectly

acceptable. By contrast, empty slots in syntactic patterns must be filled or else are ungrammatical (12b).

- (11) a. We must leave no legal stone unturned.
- b. We must leave no \_\_\_\_ stone unturned.
- (12) a. We danced the evening away.
- b. \*We \_\_\_\_ the evening away.

Whenever it is relevant, I will attempt to preserve the distinction by using the terms “single lexical items” when referring to single substantive items and fixed idiomatic expressions on the one hand, and “syntactic patterns” when referring to larger at least partially abstract forms on the other.

A drastic leveling of all language forms under one label amounts to deciding that everything in a language is a “form,” “pattern,” or any other noncommittal designation, analogically to biologists suddenly referring to everything as “life forms” while, at the same time, down-playing traditional taxonomic distinctions. To disregard the traditional distinctions is to forego categorizing and the advantages that flow from it. One important purpose of categorizing is that it renders it possible to make valuable inferences about members of categories. In the case of open- and closed-class forms, one can predict properties of constructions that have not been observed yet or properties eclipsed by observations of questionable accuracy. In other words, relying on categorization may help avoid postulating inaccurate properties for closed-class items.

Of course, opponents of categorizing could argue, as they do, that the categories closed- and open-class forms or lexical and grammatical items cannot serve as bases for inferences, because they are very imprecise and are not separated by a clear division. But this is true of all categories. No truly discrete categories exist<sup>3</sup> (that is, ones that do not transition into neighboring categories), but even imprecise idealizations are still useful enough.

Thus, despite an evident concern to treat all constructions equally as capable of exhibiting rich non-banal properties that should be studied regardless of the kind of language pattern they represent, this egalitarian approach may conceal peculiarities of constructions distinguishing one kind of linguistic patterns from another. I believe that equating them obscures the fact that constructions in the traditional sense (i.e. as templates of variables with some substantive slots) have meanings that differ from the kinds of meanings one can find in open-class items. If their meanings

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Dawkins observes that even categories such as “animal species” which are habitually taken for granted as inherently discrete are illusions, as many species have been found to have intermediate forms (Dawkins, 2004, p. 17).

can be more contentful, it is by virtue of fixed lexical material embedded in the constructions. It is through the fixed lexical material that the meaning of a construction can be enriched. I do not take issue with the idea that grammatical constructions are characterized by varying degrees of semantic content, but as a rule of thumb, the more lexically specified a construction, the more contentful the meaning it can carry.

Referring to all items of a language as constructions is motivated by the difficulty of drawing a sharp distinction between what is and is not a construction in the traditional sense. Larger patterns are not demarcated sharply from single lexical items but transition smoothly into them, as Table 1 illustrates.

**Table 1.** The syntax-lexicon continuum (Croft & Cruse 2004, p. 255)

| Construction type                | Traditional name               | Examples                          |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Complex and (mostly) schematic   | <b>syntax</b>                  | [SBJ <i>be-TNS V-en by OBL</i> ]  |
| Complex, substantive verb        | <b>subcategorization frame</b> | [SBJ <i>consume OBJ</i> ]         |
| Complex and (mostly) substantive | <b>idiom</b>                   | [ <i>kick-TNS the bucket</i> ]    |
| Complex but bound                | <b>morphology</b>              | [NOUN-s], [VERB-TNS]              |
| Atomic and schematic             | <b>syntactic category</b>      | [DEM], [ADJ]                      |
| Atomic and substantive           | <b>word/lexicon</b>            | [ <i>this</i> ], [ <i>green</i> ] |

However, the distinction is not as blurred as the transition from closed- to open-class items, although the two distinctions do correlate in that schematic grammatical constructions lie toward the closed-class end of the continuum. One useful diagnostic of a construction is based on the traditional notion of a construction as a way of combining parts into larger groupings. Thus, a construction should be at least partially amenable to integration. In other words, what makes a unit a construction is its ability to productively form new expressions by means of open variables, as is the case of the *x's way* construction (*He conned/faked/aced his way to Harvard*) or the time *away* construction (*We danced/schmoozed/drank the night away*). The term grammatical construction should be reserved to grammatical complexes with at least one slot left unfilled. This study will look at examples of grammatical constructions as they are defined by Bybee (2010, p. 25), who states that "most or all constructions are partially schematic—that is, they have positions that can be filled by a variety of words or phrases." They are closed-class in nature.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that closed-classedness is a redundant construct, duplicating the idea of construction. Some constructions are more closed-class than others, which tend strongly toward the open-class territory. Also, many single lexical items such as pronouns are closed-class.

Single lexical units, compounds (*hot-dog, lowdown*) and fixed phrases (such as *over-egg the cake*) clearly do not meet this criterion.<sup>5</sup> Similar assumptions seem to be implicit in Croft's (2007) approach to constructions. Although he equates larger syntactic patterns with single lexical words under the label "construction," he also views syntactic constructions as "grammatical structures larger than just a single word" (p. 465) and refers to a construction in the traditional sense as "a pairing of a *complex grammatical structure with its meaning*" (p. 463, my emphasis).

Viewed this way, constructions belong to the closed-class system, which also includes elements like function words and bound morphemes responsible for inflection. This is what Table 2 illustrates: the continuum championed by most cognitive linguists is presented here as containing entities varying along two dimensions. First, they range from being substantive to schematic, but stretched between these extremes are entities of two kinds: the atomic and the complex. Thus, toward the fully schematic extreme (which coincides with the closed-class end of the continuum) are

**Table 2.** A two-dimensional syntax-lexicon continuum

|                   | Atomic   | Complex   |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Fully schematic   | Syntactic categories<br>[DEM], [ADJ]                 | Syntactic patterns<br>[SBJ V OBJ]   |
| ↑                 | Function morphemes (bound)<br>[NOUN-s], [VERB-TNS]   | Syntactic patterns<br>[SBJ <i>be-TNS V-en by OBL</i> ]<br>[(as) ADJ as DET N] |
|                   |  |   |
|                   | Function morphemes (free)<br>[the], [which]          | Idioms<br>[kick-TNS <i>the bucket</i> ]                                       |
|                   |  |   |
| ↓                 | Lexical-function (prepositions)<br>[along], [aboard] | Phrases, compounds<br>[hot dog]   |
| Fully substantive | Simplex lexical words<br>[require], [green]          | Complex lexical words<br>[requirement], [greenish]                            |

<sup>5</sup> Note that transitive verbs do not belong under this classification, even though they carry an open slot for an object, and thus combine with objects to form collocations or completely novel combinations. For example, the verb *treat* can participate in a potentially infinite number of combinations which, apart from collocations (*treat a patient, treat sewage, etc.*), also include freer combinations as in "the paper treats abstract understanding/the viability of economy." Despite this rampant combinatoriness, the verb *treat* is not a construction. What is responsible for the combinations is the transitive construction V+NP which incorporates lexical items. The transitive pattern is a construction in the sense that it is a productive pattern that can incorporate smaller lexical entries.

both complex entities such as schematic grammatical constructions (e.g. the passive construction) and atomic elements such as function words or syntactic categories. These have all been traditionally been classified as closed-class forms.

There are a considerable number of properties that closed-class forms have in common and these will be reviewed in the next chapter. These commonalities suggest that despite the inherent fuzziness, the distinction between the lexicon with its lexical items and fixed phrases, and syntax with its constructions and other closed-class forms is real enough to be observed, and it may be misguided to treat the contents of these two components on equal terms.

## 1.9. Overview

The next chapter will look at the question of the lexicon-syntax distinction. It will focus on the reasons why it has been suspended in recent theorizing, and will then go on to review a number of characteristics of open- and closed-class forms that set the two systems apart. Chapter 3 will concentrate on a number of constructions reported in recent constructionist literature that purportedly exhibit striking elaborate semantic effects. Because the rich meanings of these constructions pose a challenge to the main thesis of this study, they will each be analyzed in some detail in order to establish that the effects in questions are not stable components of these constructions' semantic content.

Then in Chapters 4 and 5, two large constructions—the Manner of Obtainment Construction and the *x's way* construction—will be analyzed so as to demonstrate how their semantic content is the product of blending event schemas. In Chapter 6, some examples of schematic patterns will be shown to exhibit what at first glance may appear to be fairly exotic semantic effects. However, these will be argued to be instances of more general metonymic processes, not independent meanings developed individually by each of the constructions in question. The significance of the difference is that metonymic processes are far from being detailed contentful meanings; instead, they are firmly in the universal inventory upon which constructions can draw freely enough. In Chapter 7, we will revisit the question of the lexicon-syntax continuum. In light of the findings from the preceding chapters, a revised model of the constructicon will be attempted.

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Konrad Szcześniak

Znaczenie konstrukcji  
Kognitywne spory o podział na leksykon i składnię

Streszczenie

Niniejsza praca poświęcona jest analizie konstrukcji gramatycznych w ramach kognitywnego modelu Gramatyki Konstrukcji (*Construction Grammar*). Celem pracy jest wykazanie, że tradycyjny podział na leksykon i składnię (oraz na wyrazy leksykalne i funkcyjne) podany w wątpliwość w wielu najnowszych modelach jazykoznawczych, jest nadal aktualny i nie musi być sprzeczny z założeniami jazykoznawstwa kognitywnego. Opracowanie rewiduje przesłanki, którymi kierują się obecnie jazykoznawcy odrzucający podział na leksykon i składnię. Jedną z tych przesłanek, którą kwestionuje niniejsze opracowanie, jest rozmycie granic między leksykonem i składnią. Ważnym argumentem przemawiającym za odrzuceniem podziału są spostrzeżenia płynące z kognitywnych analiz konstrukcji gramatycznych, które wskazują na zdolność schematycznych konstrukcji do wyrażania złożonych i bogatych treści semantycznych. Takie zdolności semantyczne są sprzeczne z przyjętą charakterystyką form funkcyjnych, w myśl której formy te są ubogie w znaczenia albo wręcz ich pozbawione, ponieważ ich głównym zadaniem jest spełnianie funkcji gramatycznych. W ostatnich latach, autorzy wielu opisów konstrukcji gramatycznych przekonywali, że konstrukcje gramatyczne mają właśnie znaczenia typowe dla wyrazów leksykalnych. Niniejsza praca skupia się na szeregu konstrukcji gramatycznych i wykazuje, że najnowsze analizy konstrukcji, takich jak „*x's way*” czy „*time away*,” przypisywały im przesadnie bogate znaczenia. Powtórna analiza zachowania tych form skłania do wniosku, że zawartość semantyczna konstrukcji jest dokładnie tak uboga i schematyczna, jak przewiduje to tradycyjna charakterystyka wyrazów funkcyjnych, podczas gdy bogate znaczenia obserwowane w ostatnich analizach są jedynie efektami pragmatycznymi wynikającymi ze specyfiki konkretnych kontekstów.

Główna teza opracowania uzasadniona jest dyskusją o następującej strukturze. W rozdziałach 1 i 2, omówiony jest tradycyjny podział na leksykon i składnię, po czym przytoczone są argumenty autorów proponujących jego podważenie. Następnie dokonany jest przegląd cech odróżniających wyrazy leksykalne od funkcyjnych, przy założeniu, że znaczna liczba różnic między tymi grupami wskazuje na prawdziwość podziału na leksykon i składnię. Rozdział 3 zawiera krótkie opisy konstrukcji, z których kilka było już wcześniej analizowanych w literaturze kognitywno-lingwistycznej. Niniejsza analiza dowodzi jednak, że konstrukcje nie wykazują się wyjątkowo bogatymi znaczeniami przypisywanymi im w dotychczasowych opracowaniach. W rozdziałach 4 i 5 przedstawione są dwie konstrukcje (t.j. *manner of obtainment* i *x's way*), które opisane

są pod kątem aspektualnej struktury ich znaczenia. Tutaj celem jest wykazanie, że treściwość konstrukcji nie wychodzi poza ramy możliwości złożen schematów zdarzeniowych (*event schemas*). Rozdział 6 skupia się na przykładach sekwencji składniowych, które charakteryzują się wyjątkowo ciekawymi znaczeniami, dość nietypowymi dla skonwencjonalizowanych konstrukcji schematycznych, a zatem będącymi problemem dla głównej tezy opracowania. Jednak, zawarta w rozdziale analiza prowadzi do wniosku, że przedstawione przykłady nie są konstrukcjami gramatycznymi. Różnice między przypadkami omówionymi tutaj a konstrukcjami gramatycznymi pokazują, że formy, które na pierwszy rzut oka wydają się być wyjątkiem od reguły, w ostatecznym rozrachunku są jej potwierdzeniem.

Konrad Szcześniak

**Le sens des structures**  
**Un débat cognitif sur la division entre le lexique et la syntaxe**

Résumé

Ce travail est consacré à l'analyse des structures grammaticales dans le cadre du modèle cognitif de la grammaire de construction (*construction grammar*). Nous nous y donnons la tâche de démontrer que la distinction traditionnelle entre le lexique et la syntaxe (ainsi qu'entre les mots lexicaux et les mots fonctionnels), tout en étant mise en doute dans plusieurs des nouveaux modèles linguistiques, est toujours valable et elle ne doit pas être contraire aux principes de la linguistique cognitive. Dans cette étude nous révisons les hypothèses des linguistes qui rejettent la division entre le lexique et la syntaxe. Une des prémisses qu'on met en cause ici est la frontière floue entre le lexique et la syntaxe. L'argument fort pour le rejet de la division serait donc que les idées dérivées de l'analyse cognitive des structures grammaticales montrent la capacité de la construction schématique à exprimer le contenu sémantique complexe et riche. Nous essayerons pourtant montrer que ces capacités sémantiques sont contraires aux traits des formes fonctionnelles généralement reconnues, selon lesquels ces premières sont pauvres en sens ou même d'en privées parce que leur tâche principale ne consiste qu'à exercer les fonctions de grammaire. Dernièrement, nombreux sont les ouvrages sur les structures grammaticales où on nous persuade de leurs sens qui est typique des mots lexicaux. Dans ce travail nous nous concentrerons sur une gamme de structures grammaticales et nous montrons que l'analyse récente de structures tel que „*x's way*” ou „*time away*” leur attribue beaucoup trop de signification. Le nouvel examen du comportement de ces formes nous conduit à la conclusion que le contenu sémantique des structures est exactement si pauvre et schématique, comme prévu dans la caractéristique traditionnelle de mots de fonction, et que la signification riche du contenu observée dans des études récentes est simplement un effet pragmatique résultant de la spécificité des contextes particuliers.

Pour soutenir la thèse principale de cette étude nous proposons l'ordre qui suit. Ainsi, dans le 1<sup>er</sup> et le 2<sup>e</sup> chapitre nous présentons la distinction traditionnelle entre le lexique et la syntaxe, et nous citons les arguments des auteurs minant son existence. Ensuite, nous passons en revue les traits caractéristiques distinguants les mots lexicaux des mots de fonction, tout en indiquant qu'un nombre important de différences entre les groupes pointe vers la justesse de la division en question. Le 3<sup>e</sup> chapitre contient une brève description des structures, dont certaines ont été déjà analysées dans la littérature cognitivo-linguistique. Notre analyse montre toutefois visiblement que ces structures ne sont pas plus riches en sens que les études les plus récentes leur auraient attribuées.

Par la suite, dans le 4<sup>e</sup> et 5<sup>e</sup> chapitre nous présentons deux structures (*manner of obtainment* et *x's way*) qui sont décrites en fonction de la structure aspectuelle de leur signification. Ici, notre but est de démontrer que la richesse de la signification d'une structure ne va pas au-delà des possibilités d'assemblage des schémas d'événements (*event schemas*). Le 6<sup>e</sup> chapitre, permet de nous concentrer sur les exemples des séquences syntaxiques, qui se caractérisent par un sens particulièrement intéressant, tout à fait inhabituel pour les constructions couramment utilisées et qui, par conséquent, constituent un défi pour la thèse principale de l'étude. L'analyse que nous y proposons mène toutefois à la conclusion que les exemples que nous présentons ne sont pas des structures grammaticales du tout. Les différences entre ces cas évoqués et des structures grammaticales montrent que les formes qui au début semblent être des exceptions à la règle tendent à la fin de la confirmer.

# The Meaning of Constructions

The hallmark of Construction Grammar, its revision of the hypothesis of syntactically transparent semantic compositionality, can be and has been taken to extreme by expecting syntactic patterns to behave semantically like lexical items. However, just because syntactic constructions used to be falsely believed to be transparent does not mean that they should now be vividly colorful. That would be going from one extreme to another.

The semantic capabilities of syntactic constructions are contingent on their position on the lexicon–syntax continuum, which in this study is assumed to accommodate the traditional lexicon–syntax division. The lexicon–syntactic divide may have been dismissed too soon. Even if the boundary is inherently and irreparably fuzzy and no practical way of demarcating the two magisteria can be found, this is no reason to abandon the distinction. It is one thing to establish the fuzziness of the boundary, and quite another to conclude that it means the absence of that boundary.

Więcej o książce



CENA 20 ZŁ  
(+ VAT)

ISSN 0208-6336  
ISBN 978-83-8012-272-7

